

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ARA-16 ISO-00 SAJ-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07

H-03 INR-11 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01

SP-03 SS-20 USIA-15 AID-05 COME-00 EB-12 FRB-03

TRSE-00 XMB-07 OPIC-12 CIEP-03 LAB-06 SIL-01 OMB-01

SCI-06 FEA-02 INT-08 DRC-01 /185 W

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P R 042118Z OCT 74

FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2947

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

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AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

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E. O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, FR

SUBJECT: FRENCH INTERNAL POLITICAL SCENE: SEPTEMBER

REF: PARIS 23156

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SUMMARY: THE ENERGY CRISIS IS DOMINATING FRENCH

POLITICAL LIFE TO THE POINT OF OBSESSION DURING THE TRADITIONAL FALL "RENTREE." THE PUBLIC SEEMS TO REALIZE THAT THE WORST IS YET TO COME. GISCARD HAS THUS FAR SHOWN CONSIDERABLE DEXTERITY IN AVOIDING PERSONAL BLAME FOR FRANCE'S WORSENING ECONOMIC DILEMMA. END SUMMARY

2. WITH GREATER RELUCTANCE THAN USUAL' THE FRENCH PUT BEHIND THEM THEIR AUGUST VACATION AND TURNED TO FACE WHAT ALL REALIZE WILL BE A DIFFICULT YEAR. PRESIDENT GISCARD D'ESTAING'S "HONEYMOON" PERIOD, WHICH LASTED THROUGH THE SUMMER, ENDED IN SEPTEMBER; BUT AN IFOP POLL ISSUED ON SEPTEMBER 26 SURPRISINGLY SHOWED THAT HIS PERSONAL POPULARITY HAD INCREASED FROM 47 TO 53 PERCENT. THE SOCIALIST-COMMUNIST OPPOSITION, AS WELL AS SOME DISGRUNTLED GAULLISTS' PROVED UNABLE TO FOCUS THEIR CRITICISM ON ANY ONE ELEMENT OF GISCARD'S PROGRAMS, CONTENTING THEMSELVES WITH REPROACHING THE PRESIDENT FOR GRANDSTANDING AND FOR DEALING WITH ATMOSPHERICS WHILE IGNORING PRESSING PROBLEMS. THE TWO MAJOR NEWSWEEKLIES AND MOST OF THE MAJOR PARIS DAILIES IMPORED GISCARD TO LEVEL WITH THE FRENCH PEOPLE ON THE GRAVITY OF FRANCE'S ECONOMIC SITUATION.

3. BUT GISCARD HAS REFUSED TO REPLY IN KIND. HE MADE IT CLEAR IN SEPTEMBER CABINET MEETINGS THAT HE IS IN FOR THE LONG HAUL AND HAS NO INTENTION OF RESPONDING TO EVERY CRITICISM. HE SAID THAT HE WAS NOT CONFUSING GRANDEUR WITH POMPOSITY -- A PHRASE TO WHICH HE MAY HAVE OCCASION TO RETURN IN THE MONTHS AHEAD. GISCARD HAS ALLOWED FINANCE MINISTER FOURCADE TO ACT AS GOVERNMENT SPOKESMAN -- AND WHIPPING BOY -- ON ECONOMIC MATTERS, ON THE APPARENT ASSUMPTION THAT DEPENDING ON HOW THE FRENCH ECONOMY EVOLVES, FOURCADE IS WELL-PLACED TO ACCEPT THE NATION'S PRAISE OR SERVE AS A SACRIFICIAL LAMB.

4. MEANWHILE GISCARD DOGGEDLY PURSUED HIS POLICY OF INNOVATION AND INFORMALITY. HE AND HIS MINISTERS -- WHO TOOK COMMERCIAL TRANSPORTATION -- TRAVELLED TO LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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LYON ON SEPTEMBER 11 FOR THE FIRST CABINET MEETING HELD OUTSIDE PARIS SINCE THE GOVERNMENT FLED THE CAPITAL IN 1940. HE REJECTED THE USUAL FORMAL PRESIDENTIAL PHOTOGRAPH IN FAVOR OF ONE BY THE RENOWNED JACQUES LARTIGUE SHOWING THE SMILING PRESIDENT STRIKING A RELAXED POSE IN THE ELYSEE COURTYARD. HE CONTINUED TO DRIVE HIS OWN CAR IN PRIVATE' AND INSISTED ON A MINIMUM OF TRAFFIC DISRUPTION AND

POLICE ESCORT WHEN TRAVELLING OFFICIALLY.

5. PROBLEMS WHICH THE GOVERNMENT HAD BEEN ABLE TO
DOWNPLAY DURING THE SUMMER BECAME MORE INSISTENT DURING
SEPTEMBER. THE GOVERNMENT SERVED NOTICE LATE IN THE
MONTH THAT IT WOULD HOLD IMPORTS OF OIL IN 1975 DOWN
TO 90 PERCENT OF THE 1973 LEVEL AND THAT TO ACHIEVE
THIS GOAL, IT WOULD IMPOSE MANDATORY RESTRICTIONS ON
CONSUMPTION OF OIL FOR BOTH SPACE HEATING AND
INDUSTRIAL PURPOSES. GASOLINE RATIONING HAS BEEN
PUT ASIDE FOR THE TIME BEING IN THE INTEREST OF
SHORING UP THE LAGGING AUTOMOBILE INDUSTRY. FRENCH
FARMERS CONTINUED TO EXPRESS THEIR DISCONTENT WITH A
TIGHTER COST-PRICE SQUEEZE; THE LINER "FRANCE"
OCCUPIED BY ITS CREW, HAS SPENT THE LAST THREE WEEKS
ANCHORED OFF THE NORMANDY COAST AWAITING A MOST UNLIKELY

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DRC-01 SCI-06 FEA-02 INT-08 /185 W

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FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2948

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

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GOF DECISION TO RESTORE THE SHIP TO REGULAR COMMERCIAL SERVICE. YOUNG ARMY RECRUITS IN THE PROVENÇAL TOWN OF DRAGUIGNAN PARADED IN UNIFORM DOWN THE TOWN'S MAIN STREET ON SEPTEMBER 10 DEMANDING GREATER LIBERTIES;
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THE PRISON SITUATION ALSO REMAINED UNSTABLE. THESE PROBLEMS AND MORE HAVE YET TO BE TACKLED SERIOUSLY IN SPITE OF EXPRESSIONS OF CONCERN AND FLURRIES OF ACTIVITY BY GISCARD'S MINISTERS.

6. IN THE POLITICAL ARENA' SEPTEMBER BROUGHT MANEUVERING WITHIN ALL THE PARTIES FROM FAR LEFT TO FAR RIGHT. THE UDR SUBJECTED ITSELF TO A REMARKABLY FRANK SELF-CRITICISM, BUT TWO DAYS OF UDR PARLIAMENTARIANS' CONFERENCES ILLUSTRATED ONCE AGAIN THAT THE GAULLISTS ARE UNABLE TO REGAIN THEIR FORMER MOMENTUM AND DECISIVENESS. AT MONTH'S END BOTH THE RADICALS OF JEAN-JACQUES SERVAN-SCHREIBER AND THE CENTRISTS OF JUSTICE MINISTER JEAN LECANUET BEGAN JOCKEYING FOR POSITION. J-J S-S, ALL BUT COMPLETELY DISCREDITED AFTER HIS NINE-DAY STINT IN JUNE AS MINISTER OF REFORMS, JOINED FORCES WITH SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WOMEN'S AFFAIRS FRANCOISE GIROUD, GOVERNMENT SPOKESMAN ANDRE ROSSI' AND LABOR MINISTER MICHEL DURAFUR TO ANNOUNCE THE FOUNDING OF THE RADICAL-SOCIALIST REFORM PARTY. THIS MAY PROVE TO BE INTERIOR MINISTER MICHEL PONIATOWSKI'S PLOY TO APPEAL TO SOME OF THE MORE MODERATE SOCIALIST VOTERS. LECANUET CONTRIBUTED TO THE REALIGNMENT BY DECLARING THAT HIS CENTER DEMOCRATS COULD NOW BE CONSIDERED THE "SECOND PILLAR" OF THE REFORMIST MOVEMENT' WHOSE OTHER HALF CONSISTED OF THE NEW GROUP PLUS JACQUES DUHAMEL'S WEAKENED CENTRIST PARTY, THE CDP. THIS JOCKEYING IN THE CENTER HAS PRODUCED A DISTINCTION WITHOUT A DIFFERENCE, SINCE ALL THE FACTIONS REMAIN FIRMLY COMMITTED TO GISCARD.

7. THE STRONG SOCIALIST SHOWING IN THE FIRST ROUND OF THE SEPTEMBER 29 BY-ELECTIONS IS THE LATEST EVIDENCE OF THE MOMENTUM WHICH THE PS HAS CREATED SINCE THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS: IT HAS ADDED SOME 35'000 MEMBERS SINCE MAY AND HAS NOW ATTAINED A TOTAL MEMBERSHIP OF AROUND 145,000 AS AGAINST AN ESTIMATED PCF MEMBERSHIP OF 480.000. THE TWO MAJOR PARTNERS OF THE UNITED LEFT WILL HAVE TO RE-EXAMINE THEIR ALLIANCE AT THE SOCIALIST ASSIZES, SCHEDULED FOR OCTOBER 12-13. AND THE COMMUNIST PARTY'S EXTRAORDINARY CONGRESS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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OCTOBER 24-27. IT IS LIKELY THAT SOCIALIST RANKS WILL BE INCREASED BY THE ADDITION OF THE PARTI SOCIALISTE UNIFIE (PSL) AFTER THE CONGRESS (THE PSU REGULARLY GETS ABOUT 3 PERCENT OF THE VOTE IN NATIONAL ELECTIONS).

8. SOCIALIST SECRETARY-GENERAL MITTERRAND AND HIS OPPOSITE NUMBER, COMMUNIST SECRETARY-GENERAL MARCHAIS BOTH PRESENTED THEIR PARTIES' INDIVIDUAL ECONOMIC PROGRAMS ON SEPTEMBER 24. THE MITTERRAND STATEMENT -- A MUCH MORE DETAILED PROGRAM THAN MARCHAIS' -- CALLED FOR A SIX-MONTH PRICE AND RENT FREEZE, INDEXING OF SMALL SAVINGS ACCOUNTS, A CAPITAL GAINS TAX, A TAX ON FORTUNES EXCEEDING 2 MILLION FRANCS AND PROPOSED A 20 BILLION FRANC STATE LOAN TO WHICH PRIVATE CITIZENS WOULD BE ENCOURAGED TO SUBSCRIBE. BONDS IN THE LOAN ISSUE COULD BE BOUGHT FOR GOLD, THUS ATTEMPTING TO DRAW OUT OF HIDING AND INTO THE PUBLIC COFFERS SOME OF FRANCE'S PRIVATELY HELD GOLD HOARDS: THE PROCEEDS OF

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FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

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INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

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THE LOAN WOULD BE IN PART STERILIZED AND IN PART USED
TO FINANCE AN INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT BANK. THE
COMMUNIST PROGRAM CALLED FOR INDEXING OF INTEREST ON
SAVINGS ACCOUNTS AND JOINED WITH THE SOCIALISTS IN
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PROPOSING A REDUCTION OF THE VALUE ADDED TAX ON
NECESSITIES OF LIFE AND A TEMPORARY PRICE FREEZE.

9. IN THE MEANTIME THE COMMUNISTS INDICATED HOW FAR THEY
ARE WILLING TO GO IN WOOLING THE UDR BY SANCTIONING THE
INITIATIVE OF JEAN-PAUL FASSEAU, PRESIDENT OF THE
YOUNG GAULLISTS (WHO HAVE DECLARED THEIR INDEPENDENCE
FROM THE UDR AND DISGUST AT UDR DOCILITY VIS-A-VIS
GISCARD); FASSEAU RECENTLY HELD A WELL-PUBLICIZED
MEETING, ROUNDLY CRITICIZED BY UDR LUMINARIES, WITH
JEAN-MARIE CATALA, LEADER OF THE YOUNG COMMUNISTS.

MEANWHILE, THE SPECTRE OF MICHEL JOBERT HOVERED IN THE WINGS' MUTTERING IMPRECATIONS AGAINST THE GOF'S DEPARTURES FROM THE POMPIDOU GOVERNMENT'S STYLE AND POLICY WHILE ANNOUNCING THE IMMINENT FOUNDING OF A "UNION OF DEMOCRATS." THE GENERAL PARIS REACTION TO THE FORMER FOREIGN MINISTER'S PONTIFICATIONS SEEMS TO BE A MUFFLED YAWN, BUT JOBERT'S ACTIVITIES NEVERTHELESS CONTINUE TO GARNER PUBLICITY AS WELL AS GROWING ATTENTION IN THE PROVINCES.

10. THE FRENCH CAN LOOK FORWARD TO ROUGHER SLEDDING IN OCTOBER. MORE LABOR UNREST IS IN THE OFFING IN VARIOUS INDUSTRIES, THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR AND THE ORTF. THE ECONOMY HAS NOT TURNED THE CORNER ON INFLATION, WHICH CONTINUES AT AN ANNUAL RATE OF NEARLY 17 PERCENT. UNEMPLOYMENT SEEMS CERTAIN TO RISE SOMEWHAT. THE MOST RECENT POLLS SHOW THAT IN SPITE OF GISCARD'S PERSONAL POPULARITY THERE HAS BEEN A DECLINE IN PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IN THE GOVERNMENT AS A WHOLE. BUT GISCARD, ALTHOUGH AWARE OF THE GRAVITY OF THE PROBLEMS FACING HIM AND HIS TEAM, SEEMS DETERMINED NOT TO CHANGE EITHER HIS STYLE OR HIS GAME PLAN.
IRWIN

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